

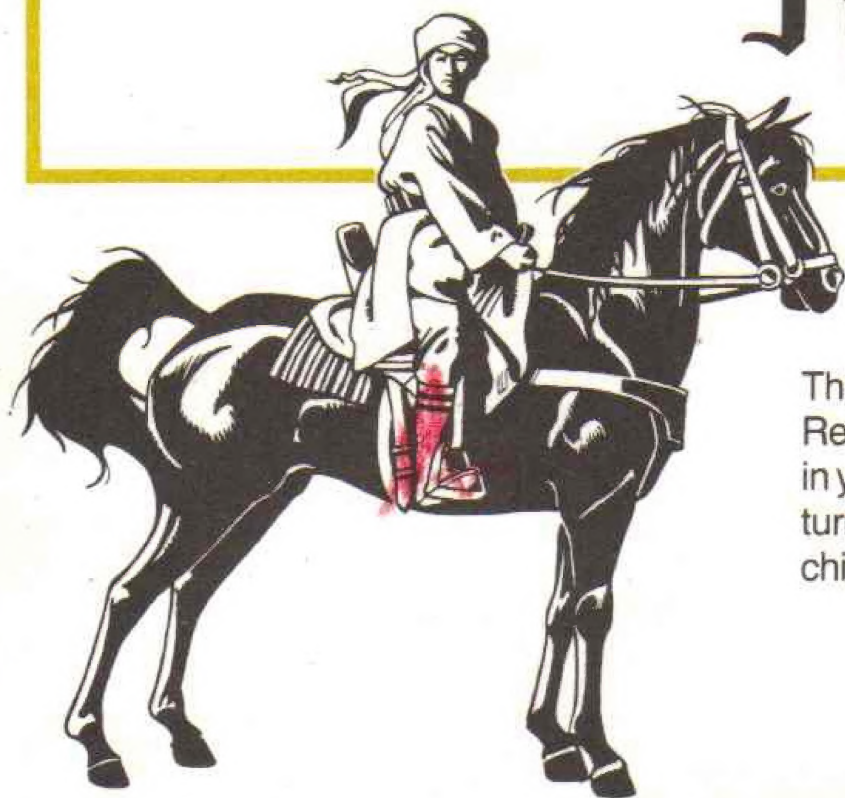
159DC

the Black Stallion Returns

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the Black Stallion Returns



This is the story of the Black Stallion Returns. You can read along with me in your book. You will know it is time to turn the page when you hear the chimes ring like this...

LET'S BEGIN NOW:



After the Black Stallion won his first big race, Alec Ramsey's mother bought a small farm in the country. Late one evening she found Alec in the barn, brushing and tending the magnificent horse. "Mom, something's bothering Black. He's really nervous."

"Oh, Alec, he's just not used to the new barn yet. You get to bed now. He'll be fine."

But she was wrong. As they walked into the house, a desert out-cast named Kurr slipped into the shadows by the barn.

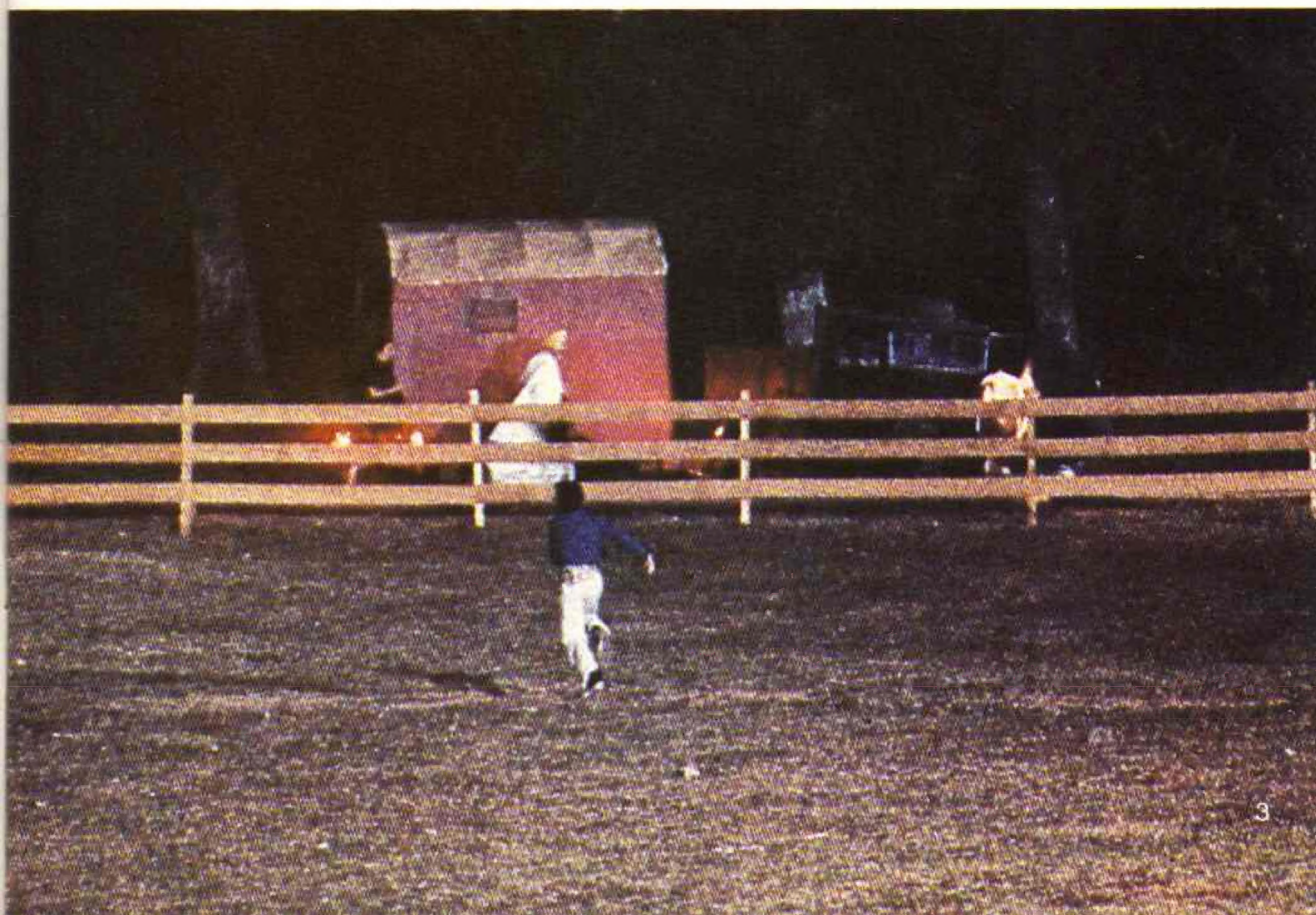


Kurr doused the barn with gasoline and, striking a match, set it ablaze! "The Stallion will win no more races *now!*"

As Alec was getting into bed, he glanced out the window. "Fire! Mom, the barn's burning! Call the fire department!" He raced out to the barn. "I'm coming, Black!" He threw the stall door open, leaped up on the horse's back, and together they plunged out into the cool, night air.

Alec tied the Stallion to a gatepost while he helped his mother fight the fire. The next time he looked around, the Black was gone!

Far across the field he saw three Arabs leading the Stallion into a trailer. They were stealing his horse! "Hey, he's mine! Stop!" He ran for all he was worth, but the truck began to pull away. With a final leap, he jumped into the trailer just as the truck sped off down the dark road.



When the truck finally stopped on a pier, Alec was ready. He jumped on the Stallion's back and they bolted out of the trailer, dashing for freedom. But a high fence blocked their only escape.

Alec was dragged from the Black to face the leader of the Arabs. "Let go of me! He's my horse! Who are you?"

"I am Abu Ben Ishak. In my country I am king. The Stallion is mine. He was stolen from me, and now I am taking him home."





Alec could only watch helplessly as the ship carrying his Stallion sailed away to Africa. "They aren't going to get away with this. I'm going to get my horse back!"

He made his way to the airport and found an airplane going to Africa. Pretending to be part of a tour group, he climbed aboard and found a hiding place. Soon the engines roared to life and the sea-plane lifted into the sky. Alec was on his way to find the Black Stallion!



At first Alec felt lost in the strange African city. But he began asking people if they knew anything of a mighty, black stallion, and soon he was led to a shabby man in a battered truck. It was Kurr! He smiled wickedly when he heard Alec's story. "If Ben Ishak is bringing the Stallion home, he'll have to pass through the oasis of Sahli. We shall meet him there."

As they drove deep into the blazing heat of the desert, Kurr began talking about his plans. "That horse is the key to great riches for me and my people. We must capture him!"

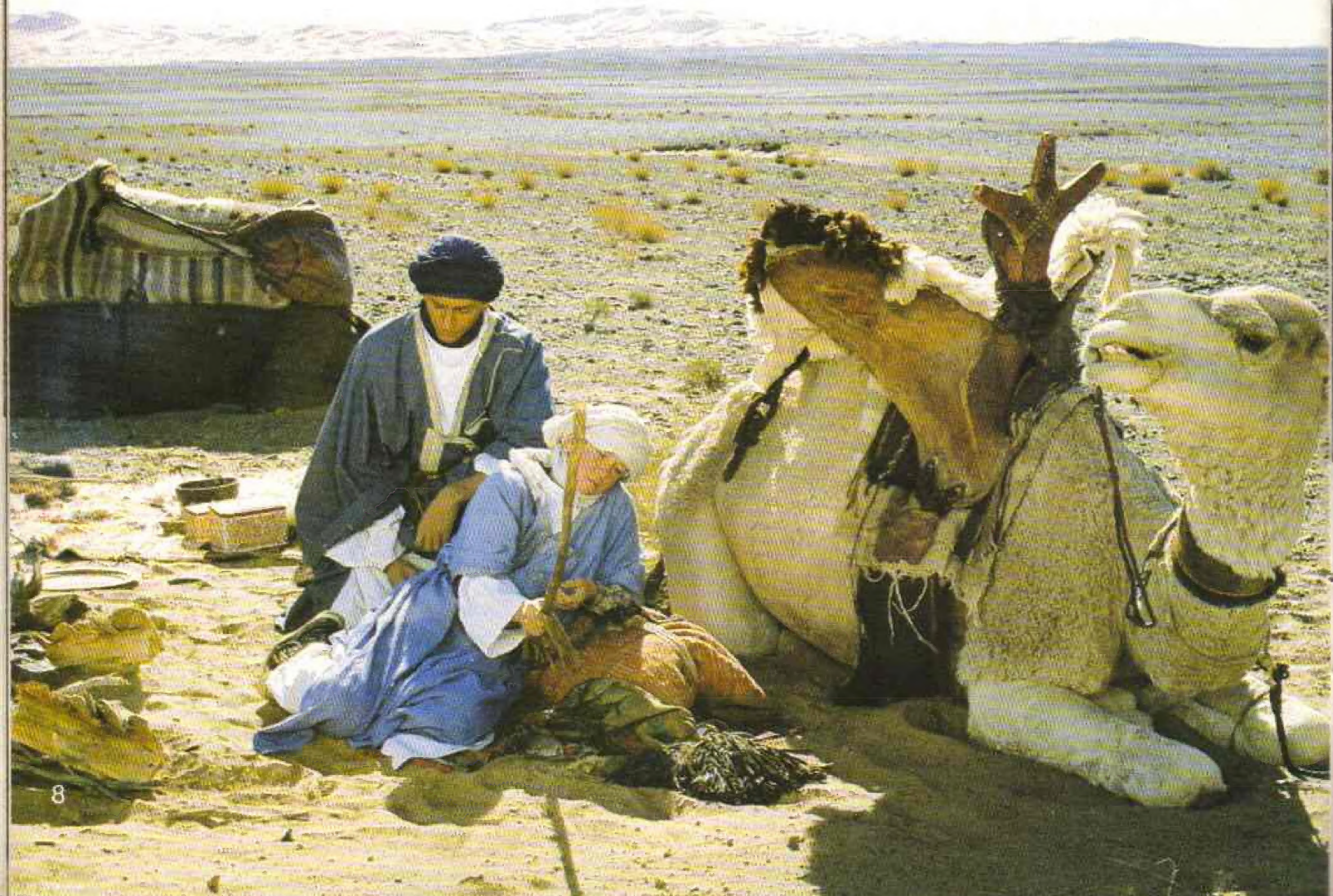
Alec couldn't believe his ears. "But you can't. He's mine!"

Kurr stopped the truck and pushed Alec out. "I don't need trouble from you, boy." And he roared off, leaving Alec alone, miles from any help.



Determined to find his horse, Alec began walking to the oasis. After hours without seeing another person, he was found by Raj, a young Arab prince, and his bodyguard, Meslar. Although Raj thought the desert was too dangerous for Alec, he agreed to take him to the oasis. "But you'd best forget about your horse, Alec. Ben Ishak will not give him back to you."

"I don't care. All I know is I have to be with Black."





As they traveled, Raj explained why Kurr wanted the Black so badly. "Every five years there is a great race among the desert tribes. The winner takes the best horses from each of the losers."

Alec nodded. "And Kurr's people know they can't win against the Black."

Raj grinned proudly. "Or against *my* tribe's horse. So we must be careful at the oasis. Kurr's men would do anything to keep me from riding for my father in the race."



The oasis was a crossroads of the desert, swarming with people from many tribes. Raj whispered to Alec. "Kurr has dozens of men here. Keep your face covered. They mustn't see us."

That night as they were sitting down to eat, a tremendous commotion erupted outside. Gunshots and shouting filled the air. Alec jumped up. "It's the Black! He must be out there!"

Alec ran to the edge of the oasis. There was the Black Stallion! He was surrounded by Ben Ishak's guards, who were battling off Kurr's bandits. Alec called out, "Black! Black, it's me!" The great Stallion heard Alec and tried to break free.

Gunfire cracked around Alec. Raj grabbed him "You'll get us all killed, child. Your Stallion will be safe once they retreat into the open desert. Now we must do the same."



Soon they were far from the oasis—but not from danger. At dawn horsemen swooped down on them. Meslar pulled his sword. “Kurr’s bandits! Make your escape, master. I will hold them off.”

Later, when the boys made their way back, there was no sign of Meslar. They were left to cross the great desert alone.





Day after day Alec and Raj struggled through the burning, endless wasteland. Soon the last of their water was gone. Every well they found was dry, but Alec didn't complain. "I've got to get my mind off water. I know, I'll think about Black instead."

Raj smiled, starting to respect the courage of this boy that he had thought was too soft for the desert.



At last the boys were too weak to go on. Raj lay in a heap, but Alec struggled to look over just one more rise. When he did, he couldn't believe his eyes. "Water! Raj, we're gonna be okay!"

Just then they heard the sound of hoofbeats behind them. Alec spun around and saw riders on horseback. "Kurr's bandits again!"

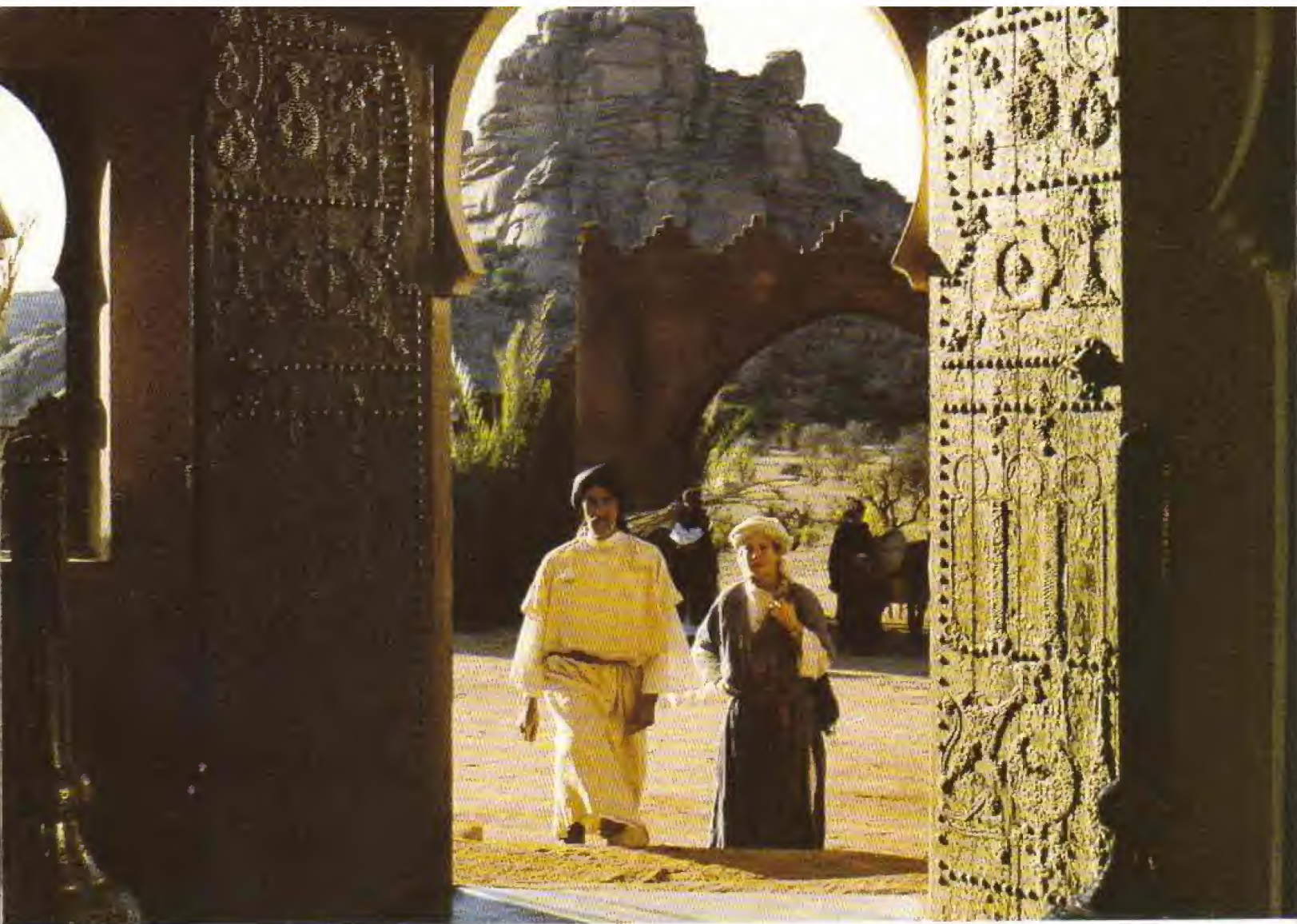
He started to dash for cover when Raj gave a shout. "No, Alec, it's my father! We're saved!"

Raj and his father guided Alec to the edge of Ben Ishak's lands, where Raj shook his hand warmly. "You must go on alone, Alec. I am not welcome here. Follow this trail to your horse."

Alec entered a rocky valley. There, proudly leading his own herd, was the Black—the horse he'd come so far to find.

Joyously, they ran to meet each other. But just as Alec threw his arms around the Stallion's neck, two Arab guards seized him.





The men brought him to a magnificent desert palace, the home of Abu Ben Ishak. Alec gulped but looked the Arab king right in the eye. "I want my horse."

Ben Ishak frowned. "He is not yours. I have sacrificed my peoples' wealth for this one horse. My granddaughter, Tabari, must ride him to victory in the great race. The survival of my people depends on it."

Alec watched Tabari try to ride the Black. But every time she climbed on, the proud Stallion reared up and threw her off.

Alec turned to the Arab king. "If you really want to win the race, you should let *me* ride him."

Ben Ishak regarded Alec sternly. "You are confusing the horse. Tomorrow you will join a caravan leaving for Casablanca."



That evening Tabari came to Alec's room. "The Stallion obeys you. Help me ride him, and perhaps Grandfather will let you stay."

"It's a deal." Together they slipped out of the palace, taking the Black to a distant meadow.

Suddenly masked bandits swept out of the night — Kurr's men! They captured Alec and the Black, and fled to their mountain camp.





The Black was locked in a makeshift corral. Alec knew that they planned to kill his horse. "We've got to escape somehow."

Alec whistled. The Stallion reared up and broke the corral gate! Alec jumped on his back, and they galloped through the camp. Alec saw a man tied up in the main square. "Meslar!"

He threw Meslar his knife and fled. The bandits followed angrily, but they couldn't catch the Black Stallion.

The next day Ben Ishak thanked Alec. "I see now that you are the only rider for this horse. I appeal to you, help my people by riding your Black in the race."

Alec couldn't believe his ears. "*My Black?*"

"He has no other master. My kingdom is now in your hands."





The day of the race tribes from all over the desert gathered in a huge camp, swirling with color and excitement. Alec saw Raj and greeted him warmly. "I wish you luck, Raj, but at the finish line you're on your own."

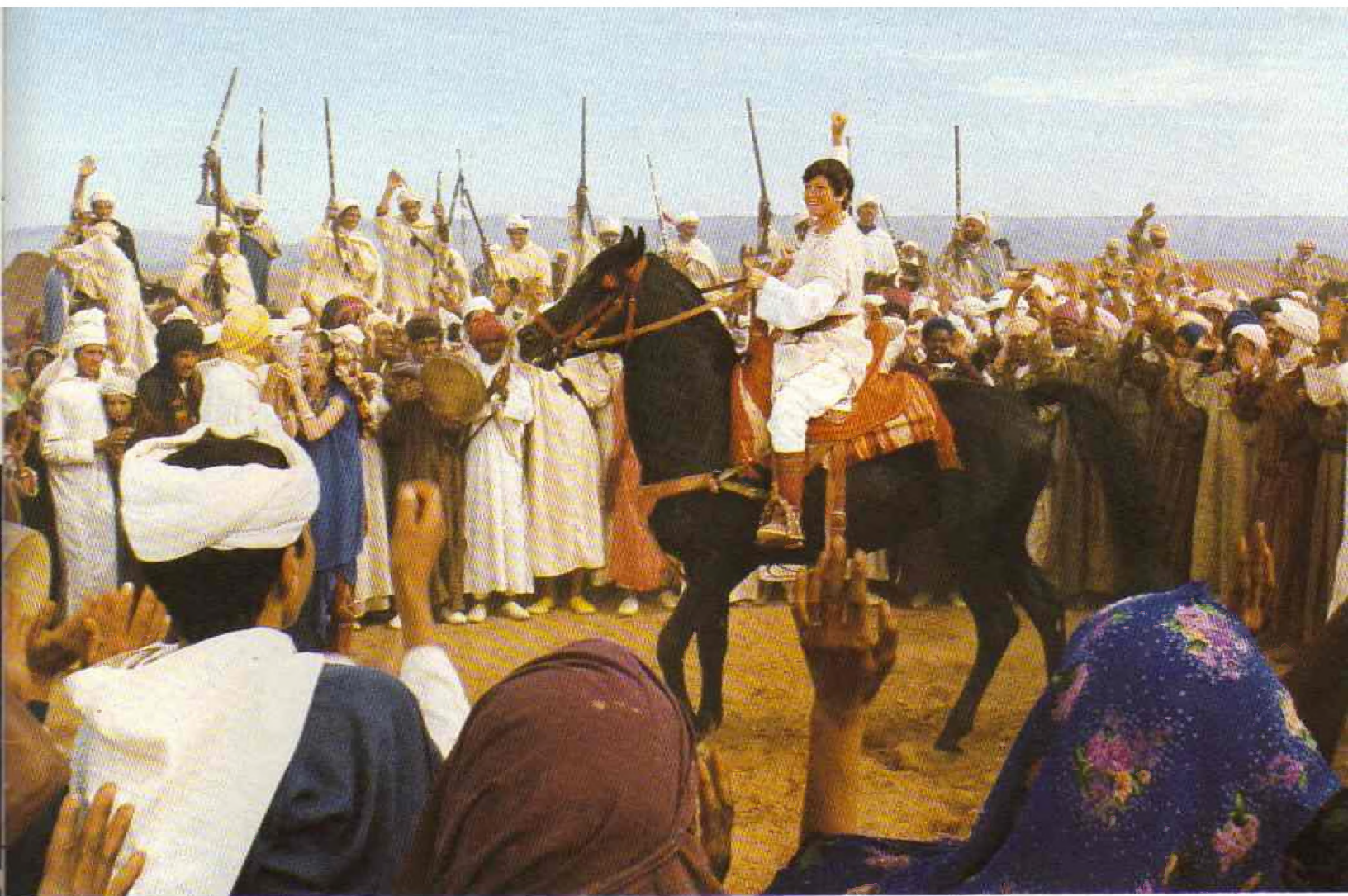
Raj smiled. "Remember, my friend, beware of Kurr's men."

Alec climbed on the Black, his heart pounding. The riders lined up, the starter dropped his arms, and the race was on!

Shouting and shoving, the riders urged their horses on over the rough ground. Kurr's rider swept up beside Alec, kicking his foot out of the stirrup and almost knocking him off the Black. Tugging at the reins, Alec just barely pulled himself back on.

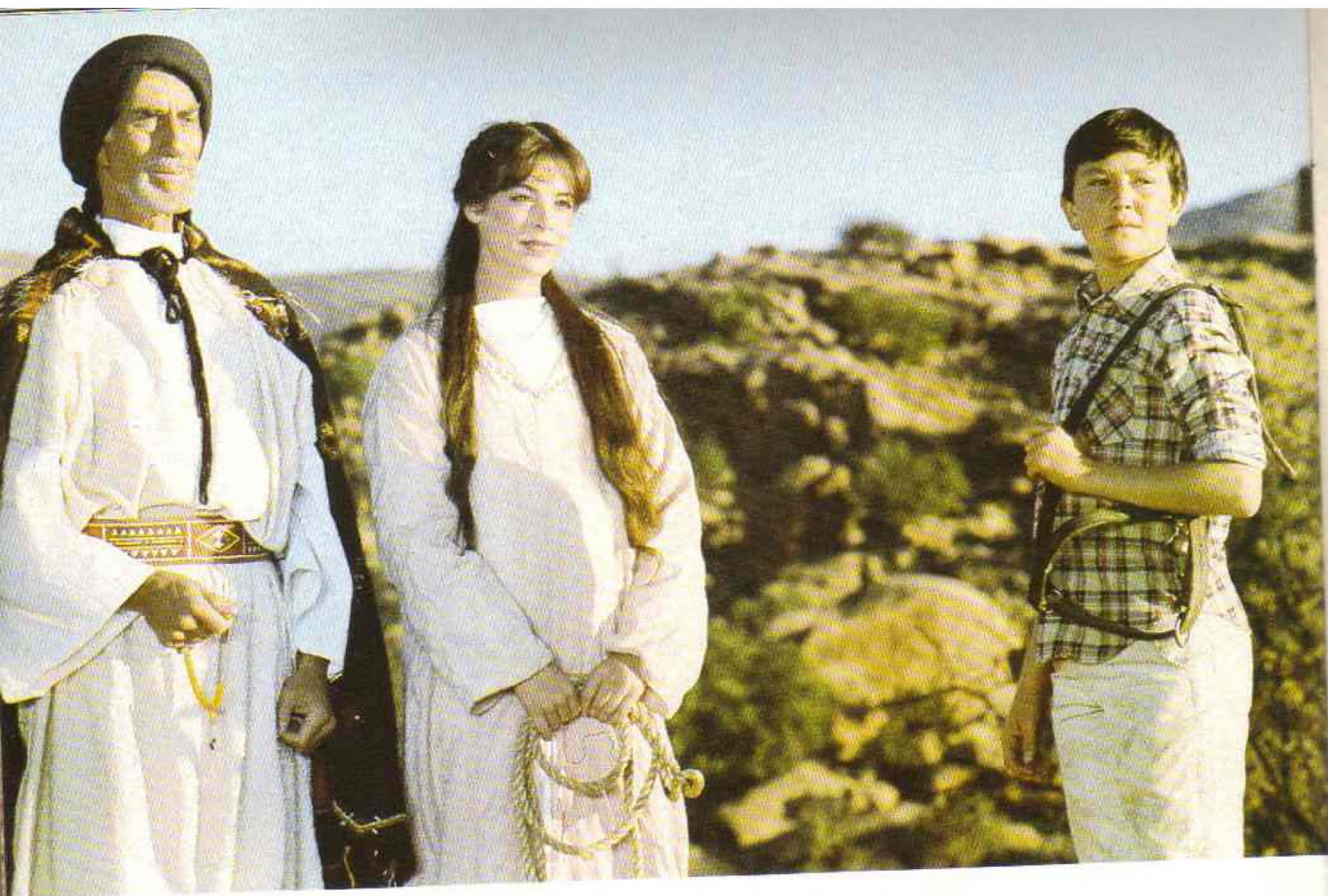
The man came at Alec again, swinging his whip. But as Alec ducked, someone pulled the rider from his horse. It was Meslar!





Now the other riders were far behind. It was only Alec and Raj. Alec could see the finish line ahead. The horses were neck and neck. He dropped the reins and grabbed the Stallion's mane. "Come on Black. You can do it. Come on!"

Raj's horse inched ahead. Then the Black Stallion, loving Alec and loving to run, found new strength. Just as they neared the finish line, he lunged ahead of Raj's horse. They'd won!



When the day came for Alec to go home, he sat for a long time watching the Black playing joyously at the head of his herd.

Finally he stood up and whistled. The Black came to him, but Alec just hugged the horse hard and set him loose in the valley again. Ben Ishak didn't understand. "But he is yours."

Feeling very grown-up, Alec smiled at the Arab king. "I know. But he *belongs* here. Keep him for me, will you? I'll be back."

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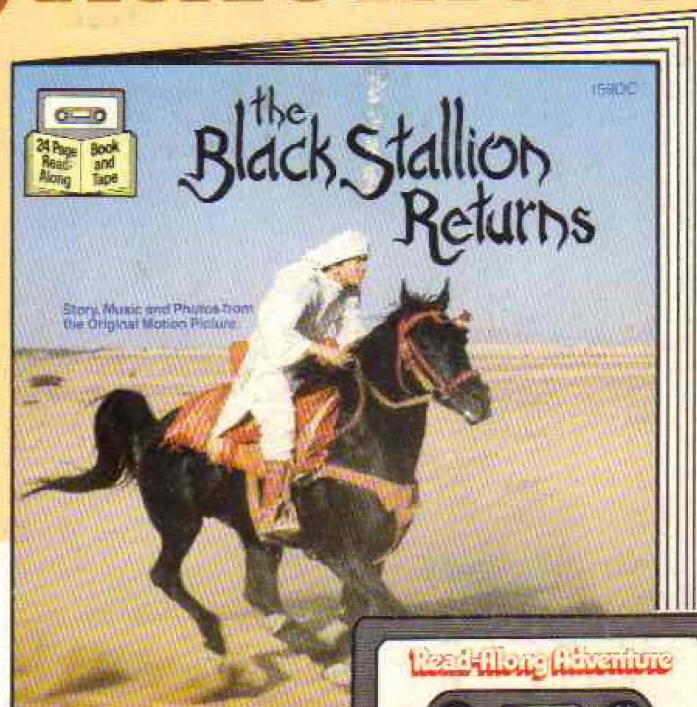
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